

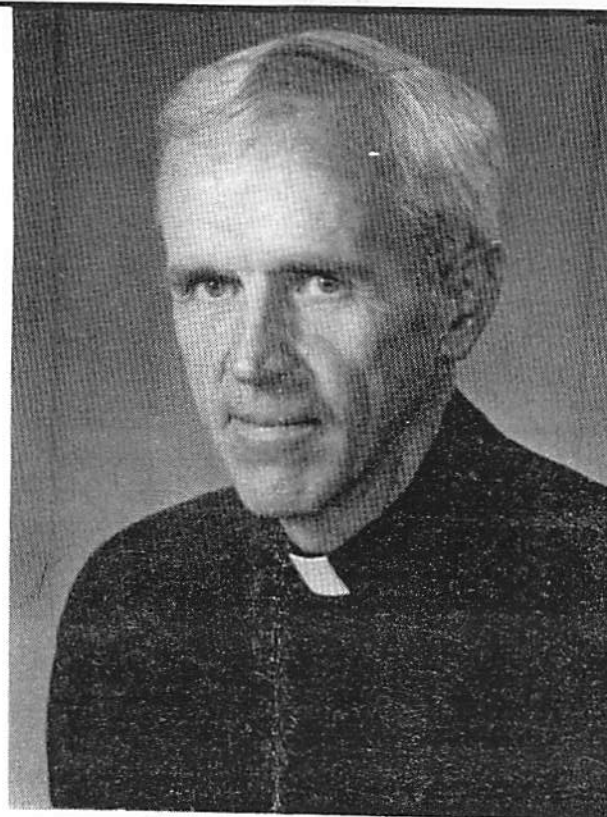
The Clipper Visits Father Francis Turke

By NANCY McCAFFERTY

Father Francis Turke has been pastor of Holy Family Parish in Duxbury for 6 years. This interview was conducted with the assumption that he would be here for at least another 6 and the questions asked were in regard to his impressions of Pope John Paul II, whom he met on a visit to Rome in 1979, and not specifically in reference to Father Turke's work here. Subsequent to the conversation with Father Turke, it was learned that he will be leaving Holy Family on June 16 for St. Agatha's parish in Milton. To this "gentle shepherd" we wish the brightest future and acknowledge his unselfish service to the people of Duxbury.

Father Turke hails from Boston. He attended Boston College for one year before transferring to Tufts University, where he majored in math. He departed to serve 3 years as an officer in the Navy in World War II. In 1952 he entered the priesthood and studied for 6 years at St. John's Seminary in Brighton. He has always been in parish work, first in Dorchester, then Winchester, followed by South Boston, and then Duxbury.

In 1979 Karol Wojtyla had recently been chosen Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, the first non-Italian Pope in 455 years. It was not official business that brought Father Turke to Rome but a pleasure trip for the soul to the center and home of the church to which he has devoted his life. As he walked around the Vatican he had a sense of awe. "It was the mother church of all the churches and I had a sense of belonging, that I was at home," he said. That February visit afforded Father Turke the opportunity to offer Mass in the little chapel under the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica, where it is



Father Francis Turke

thought that St. Peter's body is buried. He considers himself fortunate to have had this privilege. Requests for permission to say Mass in the chapel must be sent in advance because of the large number of priests from all over the world at the Vatican at any given time.

Father Turke met Pope John Paul as part of an audience in a large hall inside the Vatican. The audiences have since been moved to St. Peter's Square, weather permitting, to accommodate the vast crowds which travel to see this Pope. When

Duxbury's reaction was one of concern and kindness. "People stopped me on the street for days after it happened. Many, many non-Roman Catholics expressed sympathy," said Father Turke. "People just wanted to say they were sorry it happened."

In the lightning reaction of agitated emotions and the muddle of lumbering to find an answer, there was a beacon which Father Turke recognized as a signal from home. "I thought the Pope gave a beautiful example of forgiveness in his statement read on the Sunday after the attempt. He said 'I

asked what happens in a private audience with the Pope, Father Turke said, "I wish I knew," indicating that he was one of many pilgrims whom the Pope greeted that day. "He goes among the people and talks to them," said Father Turke. He waits for you to initiate the conversation to see what language will be spoken. After you have introduced yourself, he answers back in your native tongue -- he knows so many languages there is a good possibility that he can speak in your own language. I told him my name and where I was from and that I was a parish priest. When I mentioned Boston, he told me that Cardinal Medeiros was in Rome, too. Then he shook my hand, wished me well, and gave me his blessing. Close up I had the strong impression of a very human leader. He focuses on one person at a time and that person is the most important thing in the world then." Father Turke is a reticent man and did not give an emotional explanation of what it was like to meet this charismatic Pope but his eyes said the visit meant a great deal more than just seeing St. Peter's.

Their paths crossed again when Pope John Paul visited Boston. It was October, 1979, the day of the rains. Father Turke was selected to be a participant in the Mass celebrated on Boston Common, his part being to distribute communion. Due to the large turnout expected, it was necessary to have many priests. Father Turke doesn't know why he was chosen but says there was a good cross section of priests from all over the Boston Archdiocese. He was notified a few weeks beforehand and he says he was "Pleased!" that he was to be a part of it.

This time Father Turke didn't have an opportunity to speak personally to the Pope -- he was on the Common while the Pope was at Holy Cross Cathedral or on the motorcade -- but it didn't seem to matter. There was a communication of spirit with every person who was there that day.

"Many priests were amazed that there was so much excitement," said Father Turke. As a group priests are sometimes hard to move but on that day everyone was moved. It was raining hard but it was

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as if it wasn't raining at all -- the attention was absolute. His sermon was directed to youth but it was really for everyone. It was a fundamental message calling people to Christ. He offered a challenge. He talked about the option to love, the opposite of escapism through violence, drugs and selfishness. It was a call to follow Christ, to recognize the dignity of the individual. I personally feel that youth does respond to a challenge. The Pope touched people and made them think."

Father Burke saw what he can only describe as joy. "It was exuberant, it was loud! People who ordinarily are not demonstrative were very demonstrative that day. I have never seen anything like it."

This Pope electrifies people and it seems to happen wherever he goes. "I can't say exactly what it is about him," said Father Burke. "He obviously has leadership qualities and a worldwide view of the church...different people, different cultures to whom he's carrying the basic message of Christ. He wants to be close and available to the people. He wants to be with them. Before coming to the U.S., he said he wanted to have communion with the people. Some of the news reporters didn't explain what he meant by communion. He meant he wanted to be close to the people and offer the Eucharist wherever he went. It is just his way."

Father Burke suggests that the effect of Pope John Paul's visit to the U.S. seems to be a renewed sense of pride in the church which can be felt at the parish level. He thinks the Pope reached out and touched people who had dropped out, made them question and has opened the doors to welcome them back. He has undoubtedly led a tremendous religious revival and has done so with remarkable informality and infectious popular appeal.

Father Burke was in Boston when he heard the news about the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul. "I turned on the TV for the noon news and my first reaction was disbelief. I thought I hadn't heard it correctly. Then when I knew it was true, I called Father Kiely, Holy Family's associate pastor, in regard to arranging a Mass for the Pope that evening." The Boston Archdiocese asked that masses be said on behalf of the Pope but most parishes had already done so on their own.

There was a combination of shock and prayers for recovery as the world's 724 million Catholics learned of the attack. From people of all faiths there was an outpouring of sorrow for a Pope who had traveled the globe preaching peace and human rights. It was more than many could bear. "What's happening in the world? What kind of madness has been let loose?" asked Vice President Bush. "The world is horrified. All of us grieve over this terrible act of violence," from President Reagan still recovering from his own wound. "How could they do this?", the Pope's own question repeated by millions in their

He didn't refer to the assassin as a deranged terrorist or an insane radical. He called him his brother."

While the Pope recuperates, the Vatican's secretary of state carries on the ordinary work of the church. He does not have the authority the Pope has. For example, he cannot appoint bishops or call councils but he can make judgments on the day to day business of the church. It is doubtful whether this turn of events will filter down to affect the parish level.

But this doesn't seem to be a Pope who will be content to rest very long. "I would be surprised if he didn't go back to work soon, probably sooner than his doctors would like," said Father Burke. "More than anyone else, he does quite a bit of teaching by way of his weekly audiences. This is important to us. He does it in a logical way, as if he were giving a course on a given subject. I doubt that the assassination attempt will slow him down very much. He doesn't seem to be able to stay away from the people. He doesn't seem to want to."

The assassination attempt bound together people of all faiths in sympathy and concern. It may be one of the positive aspects of a negative event. The outlook is hopeful and the work of the church goes on. A high Jesuit official in Rome commented, "For a man who has come up the hard way under Nazism and Communism as he has, nothing will deter John Paul. If anything, I suspect he will emerge with renewed zest and determination." Or as Shakespeare put it, "His courage mounteth with occasion."